

# Transitional Pastor Policy

## Mennonite Church USA<sup>1</sup>

### Rationale and Objectives

There has been a growing recognition of the value of transitional pastor ministry in congregations throughout Mennonite Church USA. At the same time, there has been an increasing shortage of qualified transitional pastors. To encourage existing transitional pastors to continue and to add significantly to their ranks, attention needs to be given to:

1. The establishment of common practices in transitional pastor ministry in Mennonite congregations;
2. Addressing employment issues peculiar to transitional pastors;
3. Working relationships between transitional pastors and conferences, among conferences, and between conferences and Mennonite Church USA.

### Definitions

*Transitional pastors* (sometimes referred to as intentional interim pastors), serve congregations during interim times, typically between long-term pastors or lead pastors. They are specialists who provide leadership that enables a congregation to work at focused agenda which results in healing, clarifying identity, discerning new vision, and setting a fresh tone for the next long-term pastor/s. Transitional pastors see that normal pastoral ministry continues through their own efforts and through empowering others to assist so that they have adequate time to devote to transitional objectives. Transitional pastors may come into conflicted settings or follow a long-term pastor that has been highly respected and loved.

*Interim pastors* provide maintenance pastoral ministry in congregations that have chosen to begin searching for long term leadership immediately after a pastor has announced a resignation or has left, or is on a sabbatical. The interim pastor is not expected to provide leadership focused on self-study and vision work.

### 1. Common practices

#### A. Qualifications

##### 1) Emotional maturity

Transitional pastors have an opportunity to model healthy pastoral ministry performance in specific areas: being self-differentiated—a non-anxious presence, practicing healthy self-care, exiting, avoiding over-functioning, enabling the congregation to make crucial decisions without interjecting personal preferences.

##### 2) Theological orientation

In situations of theological conflict, transitional pastors have a unique opportunity to clarify what it means to be Anabaptist/Mennonite in ecclesiology, and facilitate healthy congregational decisions regarding theological identity and ecclesiological understandings.

##### 3) Specialized training

a) Specialized training in transitional ministry is encouraged. Recommended opportunities include Interim Ministry Network's training, Mennonite Church USA training, and certification through a regional support group and supervision.

b) Due to the shortage of trained transitional pastors, new transitional pastors without specialized training or experience are encouraged to pursue training during an interim assignment.

c) All transitional pastors are minimally required, when logistically possible, to participate in quarterly educational and support programs (similar to those in northern Indiana, Ohio Mennonite Conference and Franconia Conference).

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**B. Context and Calling**

1) **Length of transitional pastor assignments**

The length of an interim period is determined by congregational objectives. The majority range from 12-24 months. Interim periods longer than two years are not advisable, and should only happen when specific objectives warrant it.

2) **Non-availability for long term candidate status**

All transitional pastors are required to explain the rationale for non-availability for long term candidate status during the negotiation phase, and to include in their employment contract a statement similar to the following: *The transitional pastor will not be considered as a candidate for long term pastoral leadership in this congregation.*

3) **Timing and role of the transitional pastor in the search process**

- a) Congregations are best served when they wait to begin their pastoral search process until several other items have been addressed. These include, at a minimum, work at grief, healing and reconciliation, but ideally also include clarification of the congregation's vision. The pastoral search usually occurs in the last half or third of the transitional period. Embarking on the search process before that point is counterproductive for accomplishing objectives for the transitional period.
- b) If adequate education and consultation about the search *process* is provided by the conference, the transitional pastor's role is usually limited to reminding the search committee to communicate adequately with the congregation. In cases where this resource is not provided, the transitional pastor should provide *process* education and consultation to the search committee. The transitional pastor should not be involved in providing or evaluating candidate profiles. The transitional pastor should not attend candidate interviews or candidate presentation weekends.

**C. Church Membership and Ministerial Credentials**

- 1) Transitional pastors (as well as spouse and family where applicable) are encouraged to select one local congregation in which to maintain long term membership. (This is similar to the practice of many international missionaries.) The transitional pastor's ministerial credential will remain lodged in the conference with which the transitional pastor's home congregation is affiliated.
- 2) The conference minister(s) of the transitional pastor's home conference is responsible to oversee *long term pastoral care* of the transitional pastor, e.g. sabbatical planning, vocational direction, ministerial ethics, etc.
- 3) Responsibility for addressing issues of pastoral misconduct would be assumed by the home conference in close relationship with the conference where the accusations are made.
- 4) The ministerial credential would be recognized by (but not transferred to) the conference the transitional pastor is currently serving. The ministerial leadership of the current conference is responsible for oversight of *short term pastoral care* of the transitional pastor: illness, crises, support for ministry, etc. The congregation in which the transitional pastor is serving will provide associate membership status for the transitional pastor.

**D. Supervision and Accountability**

- 1) The transitional pastor is encouraged to respect and fully participate in the supervision and accountability structures in place in each congregation being served.

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- 2) In addition to accountability in the local congregation, the transitional pastor is expected to identify and/or clarify supervision and accountability relationships within the conference structure in which the transitional pastor is currently serving.
  - 3) The area conference being served by the transitional pastor is encouraged to provide a coaching relationship or a transitional pastor peer support group to help the transitional pastor navigate the resources and culture of the conference.
  - 4) The participation of transitional pastors in current conference functions and relationships is valuable to the congregation being served, the transitional pastor, and the conference. However, the transitional pastor is constantly challenged by time limitations and sometimes might, in consultation with congregational and conference leadership, need to make unique arrangements to meet this need. In maintaining adequate support levels, he/she is sometimes not able to attend all conference and ecumenical pastors groups.

## 112 2. Employment issues peculiar to transitional pastors

### 113 A. Salary

114 The complete Mennonite Church USA guidelines will be followed for salary calculations. In  
115 addition, the congregation being served will continue salary and benefits for one month beyond  
116 the conclusion of the transitional period in recognition of the irregular nature and higher  
117 intensity level of this particular kind of ministry. This practice will provide time for  
118 regeneration and retooling for the transitional pastor before taking on the next assignment. In  
119 situations of great complexity or intense conflict which call for exceptional emotional and  
120 physical effort, congregations are encouraged to compensate accordingly by exceeding  
121 Mennonite Church USA salary guidelines, or regeneration or sabbatical recommendations. In  
122 these settings, conference ministers will advocate on behalf of the transitional pastor.  
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### 124 B. Benefits

- 125 1) Benefits shall include continuing education and retirement, as per Mennonite Church USA  
126 guidelines. In addition:  
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- 128 2) *Vacation*: Mennonite Church USA guidelines for accumulated years in ministry will be  
129 followed. The transitional pastor is generally encouraged to take short breaks of 3-7 days  
130 duration rather than a long multiple-week break.
  - 131 3) *Health Insurance*: Congregations and conferences are encouraged to be flexible in  
132 insurance matters in recognition of the unique stressor dealing with health insurance places  
133 on the transitional pastor and family. An additional month of insurance coverage will be  
134 provided by the congregation at the end of the assignment. **For congregations with**  
135 **Corinthian Plan coverage see 3b. below**

#### 137 Other Health Insurance Options:

- 138 a. The transitional pastor could be considered employed ministry staff of his/her home  
139 conference. This would insure that coverage is as seamless as possible for the  
140 transitional pastor, and would avoid underwriting that could occur in changing insurance  
141 providers. The home conference could invoice the cost of insurance to a) the  
142 congregation where serving, or b) when the transitional pastor is between assignments,  
143 directly to the transitional pastor.  
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- 145 b. Most Corinthian Plan participants have the option to continue their medical coverage for  
146 an additional 18 months after congregational employment is completed, through  
147 Continuation of Coverage. (Pastors who are Medicare eligible or enrolled in Medicare  
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149 are not eligible for Continuation.) The process for Continuation is: The congregation  
150 must cancel Corinthian Plan coverage by submitting a completed Cancellation Form to  
151 Everence when the pastor ends employment (best to submit cancellation in advance of  
152 actual date), and then Continuation will be offered directly to the pastor. If the pastor  
153 elects Continuation they will be directly invoiced until their next assignment begins,  
154 they begin other coverage, become eligible for Medicare, or the maximum period of  
155 Continuation (18 months) is reached, whichever is earliest (if the pastor does not elect  
156 Continuation, medical coverage will end on the last day of the month in which the  
157 pastor ends employment). If the new congregation is participating with The Corinthian  
158 Plan, then coverage can be transferred to the new assignment. Otherwise, the pastor on  
159 Continuation may choose to remain on Continuation until they begin other coverage/is  
160 Medicare eligible, or the 18 month maximum for Continuation ends. Congregations will  
161 cover the cost of one month of insurance premium for Continuation of Coverage under  
162 The Corinthian Plan or coverage under another plan-after the congregational assignment  
163 is completed for the Transitional Pastor.

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- 165 4) *Sabbatical*: In addition to the salary and benefit extension that covers regeneration time  
166 between assignments, congregations served by a transitional pastor will provide an amount  
167 equal to one month of regular salary for each 12 months of ministry, or fraction thereof,  
168 and prorated accordingly. Unused years toward a sabbatical in a long term congregation do  
169 not accrue when such a pastor becomes an II/T pastor, but years do accrue when an II/T  
170 pastor moves to the next assignment. This money will be placed in a sabbatical fund to be  
171 held in trust by the area conference office for that particular transitional pastor. The funds  
172 will be available for a sabbatical after several transitional assignments, based on actual  
173 accumulated service of 4 years. The home credentialing area conference will issue a 1099  
174 for tax reporting purposes at the end of the tax year when sabbatical fund monies are  
175 disbursed to a transitional pastor. Sabbatical planning is to be done by the transitional  
176 pastor in consultation with the conference minister where his/her credential is held. In  
177 situations where these monies are not fully vested or claimed, the monies shall be  
178 forwarded to the Transitional Pastor Fund, referred to in item 3, B, 5 below.

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180 5) *Expense Coverage*:

- 181 a) Congregations are encouraged to recognize that above budget expenses will often be  
182 incurred during a transitional period for such items as curricular supplies, consultants'  
183 fees, specialized training, etc.
- 184 b) Transitional pastors are expected to attend conference and denominational meetings, as  
185 are long-term pastors. The congregation will cover the expenses of attendance.
- 186 c) In addition to travel costs of carrying out the pastoral duties, there are times when the  
187 transitional pastor will need to travel longer distances from home in order to carry out  
188 the assignment and incur additional travel/lodging expense. The receiving congregation  
189 should assume responsibility for these extra expenses.
- 190 d) When a long distance commuting situation emerges, the congregation being served by  
191 the transitional pastor will assume responsibility for seeing that everything possible is  
192 done to limit commuting stressors. A transitional pastor should not incur financial  
193 liabilities for lodging or commuting costs, and should have a realistic work schedule that  
194 allows adequate time at home with family.

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196 **3. Conference Responsibilities**

197 **A. Employment Negotiations**

198 Conference leaders will serve in an advocacy role for the transitional pastor in salary and  
199 benefit negotiations. In situations where congregation/conference relationships are strained,  
200 conference leaders will advocate for the transitional pastor. When advocacy is absent, the  
201 transitional pastor needs to utilize her/his own resources to educate the congregation on the  
202 transition process. Conferences will encourage congregations to realize that interim periods are  
203 not the time to attempt to save financial resources by understaffing, since that results in  
204 transitional pastors devoting an inordinate amount of time to routine pastoral tasks.  
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#### 206 **B. Inter Conference Cooperation**

207 Cooperating conferences are encouraged to communicate freely with each other so as to  
208 maximize stewardship of the limited availability of transitional pastors. This includes the  
209 following understandings:

- 210 1) Conferences may **contact** transitional pastors in other conferences regarding potential  
211 assignments.
- 212 2) Conferences will keep each other informed, upon request, of **availability dates** of their  
213 transitional pastors.
- 214 3) **Credential** recognition: see p. 2.
- 215 4) Conferences, in consultation with the transitional pastors group, will **establish criteria** to  
216 determine who is qualified to be included in a list of recommended transitional pastors.

#### 217 **Possible criteria:**

- 218 a) completion of a training experience deemed adequate by the conference minister in  
219 consultation with the transitional pastors group.
- 220 b) completion of Interim Ministry Network's basic training or a year of  
221 supervised transitional ministry experience along with quarterly transitional pastors  
222 group participation which results in a recommendation by the supervisor who is an  
223 experienced/trained transitional pastor;
- 224 c) regular participation in a transitional pastors support group;
- 225 d) a commitment to continue in transitional pastor ministry, vis-à-vis using transitional  
226 ministry as an entry point into regular pastoral ministry or as a means of income  
227 between long term assignments.

#### 228 229 **4. Development and Promotion**

##### 230 1) Constituency Education

231 Transitional pastors, their support groups, conferences and the denomination are encouraged  
232 to make constituency education a priority through seminars and other conference and  
233 denominational venues. This includes helping congregations acknowledge the wisdom in  
234 seeking objective, outside counsel as a matter of basic congregational health at all times.  
235 Congregations are usually not the best judge in discerning their need regarding a transitional  
236 pastor or interim pastor assignment.  
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##### 238 2) Recruitment

239 Transitional pastors, their support groups, conference and denominational leaders are  
240 encouraged to develop a specific plan for recruitment to increase the ranks of qualified  
241 transitional pastors. This will include a strategy for utilizing bi-vocational transitional pastors.  
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##### 243 3) Training

244 The Transitional Pastor Group will be encouraged to provide regional training  
245 opportunities. Conferences and the denomination will work cooperatively in funding,  
246 promoting and recruiting, potential candidates for transitional pastor training events.  
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- 248 4) The Transitional Pastor Management Group shall be composed of:  
249 a. The director of denominational ministry or designee  
250 b. Two (2) conference ministers  
251 c. Two (2) transitional pastors

252 Terms for the conference ministers and transitional pastors will be three (3) years with eligibility  
253 for an additional term for a total of six (6) years. This Group shall give a report at the annual area  
254 conference ministers meeting.  
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## 257 **Expectations of Congregations Using Transitional Pastors**

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- 259 1. It is often difficult for congregations to admit the need for specialized leadership during times  
260 of transition, such as between long-term pastors or lead pastors, or during difficult periods of  
261 congregational life. There is a sense that they can handle these periods on their own.  
262 Therefore, it is very helpful, indeed imperative, that a congregation requests assistance during  
263 these times.  
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- 265 2. Congregations are expected to consult often with their conference leaders, and utilize the  
266 expertise of the Conference Minister. Keep the Conference Minister apprised of  
267 developments within the congregation, progress made, and needs which arise. Your  
268 Conference Minister wants to rejoice with you as progress is made.  
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- 270 3. The goal of a transitional period is to develop a focused agenda which speaks to the issues at  
271 hand. This agenda is often developed with the transitional pastor, and the transitional pastor  
272 will then give this agenda priority in his / her work. This agenda may include: working  
273 through grief, healing of congregational hurts, clarifying the identity of the congregation,  
274 discerning new vision, or setting a fresh tone for the next long-term pastor/s.  
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- 276 4. Be willing to work hard and to be very focused for an interim period of 12-24 months. This is  
277 intended to be a temporary period, and the transitional pastor is not to be seen as the long-term  
278 pastor.  
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- 280 5. Provide the budget necessary for the transitional pastor to bring in the needed resources to  
281 work at the agenda. This includes an adequate salary, benefits, and expenses for the  
282 transitional pastor, suggested to be, at a minimum, the guidelines of Mennonite Church USA.  
283 Benefits shall include continuing education, vacation time, and retirement.  
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- 285 6. In addition to their salary, the congregation being served will set aside one month of additional  
286 salary and benefits at the conclusion of the transitional period in recognition of the irregular  
287 nature and higher intensity level of this particular kind of ministry.  
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- 289 7. Congregations and conferences are encouraged to be flexible in all such insurance matters in  
290 recognition of the unique stressor dealing with health insurance places on the transitional  
291 pastor and family. An additional month of insurance coverage will be provided by the  
292 congregation at the end of the assignment.  
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294 [One possible way of dealing with medical insurance coverage is for the transitional pastor to  
295 be considered employed ministry staff of his/her home conference. This would insure that  
296 coverage is as seamless as possible for the transitional pastor, and would avoid underwriting  
297 that could occur in changing insurance providers. The home conference could invoice the cost

- 298 of insurance to a) the congregation where serving, or b) when the transitional pastor is  
299 between assignments, directly to the transitional pastor.]  
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- 301 **8.** In addition to the salary and benefit extension that covers regeneration time between  
302 assignments, congregations served by a transitional pastor will provide an amount equal to one  
303 month of regular salary for each 12 months of ministry, or fraction thereof, and prorated  
304 accordingly. This money will be placed in a sabbatical fund to be held in trust by the  
305 transitional pastor's home conference office for that particular transitional pastor.  
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- 307 **9.** Congregations are encouraged to recognize that above budget expenses will often be incurred  
308 during a transitional period for such items as curricular supplies, consultants' fees, specialized  
309 training, etc.  
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- 311 **10.** Provide space and priority for the transitional pastor to consult with your Conference Minister  
312 and to attend conference events, appropriate churchwide meetings, and pastor-peer meetings.  
313 The congregation will cover the expenses of attendance.  
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- 315 **11.** When a long distance commuting situation emerges, the congregation being served by the  
316 transitional pastor will assume responsibility for seeing that everything possible is done to  
317 limit commuting stressors. A transitional pastor should not incur financial liabilities for  
318 lodging or commuting costs, and should have a realistic work schedule that allows adequate  
319 time at home with family.  
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- 321 **12.** Congregations need to realize that transitional periods are not the time to attempt to save  
322 financial resources by understaffing, since that results in the transitional pastor devoting an  
323 inordinate amount of time to routine pastoral tasks.  
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- 325 **13.** Be willing to postpone or delay the pastoral search process until adequate attention is given to  
326 the issues at hand. The transitional pastor will be able to assist this discernment, and suggest a  
327 process for the congregation during its search. The Conference Minister should be brought in  
328 for this process.  
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- 330 **14.** The transitional pastor will not transfer membership to your congregation. They may become  
331 associate members for the period they serve your congregation. The TP's ordination will  
332 remain with their home conference.  
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<sup>1</sup>The Mid-States Conferences (IL, IN-MI, OH, and CDC) developed a prototype of this policy in 2008. Members of the task force were Cliff Brubaker, Gary Martin, Dan Miller, Larry Wilson, Lavon Welty, Sherm Kauffman, Tim Lichti, Wayne Nitzsche, Willie Kanagy, and Wayne Hochstetler (Chair).

The Task Force was formed at the initiative of the Leadership Meeting of the Mid-States Conferences on October 12, 2006. It met for the first time on January 22, 2007. This proposal was approved as revised at the January 28, 2008, meeting of the Mid-States Conferences. The proposal was presented and briefly processed at the December 2008 annual area church/conference ministers' meeting. With feedback from that meeting, a draft Mennonite Church USA policy was developed by Lee Lever, Director of Denominational Ministry, for discussion at the 2009 annual area church/conference ministers' meeting at AMBS. Conference ministers approved and adopted the policy with minor changes.

Minor edits were made by the Intentional Interim/Transitional Ministry Task Group (MC USA) in December, 2016: 2.A. Salary; 2.B.3.b Corinthian Plan; 2.B.4 Sabbaticals.

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